



*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil;
my cup runs over.*

Welcome Brothers and Sisters to another Fireside Chat,

The weather continues gray, bleak, wet, and, at times, unseasonably chilly, everything we need to lift our spirits. I thought after that long cold spell we had a couple of weeks ago the worst was behind us. Perhaps it is. There are floods in Cincinnati, dam breaks in Michigan, some snow in the northeast, etc.; hence, I can say once again, "It could be worse." That is becoming a monotonous theme.

This is a historical time; one which will provide a tale for generations to come. We have a pandemic that comes perhaps once in a century and which, like Satan slipping through a weak spot in our spiritual defenses, came unseen and unexpected. We were truly blind-sided, and I hate being blind-sided. Economically, we are getting body-slammed as well. We were riding an economic crest that, perhaps, should have come ashore some time ago, but it didn't and we became comfortable with the grand view and bracing air from the top of the crest. It looked like the new norm until we were brought low. Even now we don't know how low we will go. Today, we may have bottomed out or we may still be on a downward trajectory. We may come roaring out of the trough or we may be stuck in a for a long time with many waves following close behind that will crash upon us, keep us pinned in treacherous waters, or dash us upon the rocks. For the moment we live with uncertainty.

I do not think any of our number has yet caught the virus, but we live in some apprehension that we could. If we have escaped the virus, we could be suffering from the economic disruption that it has created. If we have not suffered any economic cost as yet, we live with the possibility that it may yet come. The threats are real and the concerns are justified. This is why we continue to turn to the Lord for comfort and why the primary theme of Ryan and the elders has been encouragement. Our lives have been measurably disrupted and day by day it is easy to become discouraged. This is, also, why our Fireside Chats have been looking closely at Psalm 23, a source of comfort, guidance, and reassurance that has served countless millions, if not billions, for centuries and centuries. We look to this source again today.

One of the great blessings we receive when we follow the Shepherd is He anoints our heads with oil. I think that is an image we do not relate to easily. In times of crisis does your mind think, “Oh, how I wish I had someone to pour oil over my head?” I don’t believe I ever have had that thought, have you? I do not immediately recognize that anointing the head with oil is representative of good health, perhaps mostly with a spiritual connotation, but probably also with a physical.

The idea of oil on the head has multiple meanings, all of which could apply. In James we read, “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord (Jas. 5:14).” It is not clear from the context whether the sickness is physical or spiritual. It appears to be more in a physical sense, but the oil is used in conjunction with appealing to God’s involvement in the healing. If it was strictly for a spiritual malady, I am not sure what the oil is for, except, possibly, to remind the one in need that he has been anointed.

In Isaiah 1:6 we find a reference to wounds and sores without a soothing balm, ointment, or oil. The context is Israel’s spiritual sickness, but it is illustrated with a physical healing involving oil. The two appear to go hand in hand.

In the tenth chapter of the Gospel of Luke we have the account of the Good Samaritan where “he... bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine (Lk. 10:34).” This oil is unquestionably used in a medical sense. In Mark we read, “And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them (Mk. 6:13). Certainly there was a spiritual element involved by which miraculous healings were being performed, but it was in conjunction with oil. There may be an underlying spiritual implication involved, but the immediate application is undeniably for physical healing. In the twenty-third Psalm, anointing of the head with oil certainly could be symbolic of good health in the same way that the table prepared for David in the presence of his enemies is symbolic the Shepherd supplying his needs in the midst of distress.

Anointing the head with oil has a more frequent application when one is being set apart or appointed to an important place in service to God. In Leviticus we see Moses using oil to prepare Aaron to serve as a priest to the Lord, “And he poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron’s head and anointed him, to consecrate him (Lev. 8:12).” The oil was used when Aaron

was “set apart” or “appointed” for a special role of service to God; in this case, serving as priest in the Tabernacle.

In 1Sam 10:1 Samuel anointed Saul to be king over Israel while pouring oil over his head and in 2Kgs. 9:6 Elisha did the same to Jehu when he was anointed king. In 1Sam. 16:1 the Lord directed Samuel to “fill his horn with oil” and go to Jesse to anoint David as king and in verse 13 he “took the horn of oil and anointed him.” Whenever we see a priest or a king anointed, we can assume that oil was applied and it indicated that a person is set apart for a divine purpose.

Therefore, what do we see when we read, “you anoint my head with oil?” One thing is the blessing of God’s providential care symbolized by the oil. Another thing we can infer is an appointment to kingship and/or priest. Peter refers to us as “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood (1Pet. 2:9).” As kings and priests we are consecrated; that is, anointed, to serve the Lord. In the physical sense we are granted good health, life, and physical well-being. In the spiritual sense we are priests and kings cleansed of our sins in order to serve in His kingdom.

While we may not relate automatically to the meaning of “you anoint my head with oil,” we should read this as a very good thing. Isolated from all other elements in the psalm, we may not find it comforting, but when we explore its biblical symbolism and translate it into our present circumstances, it is a powerful reminder of God’s providential care.

Do we desire safe passage through life’s travails? We have been anointed with divine oil. Do we yearn for a rapid development of a Covid 19 vaccine? Pray for it. An army of dedicated medical and research personnel is laboring 24/7 to find it. They will find it faster if God’s anointed will pray for it. Do we have we concerns for our future? We are God’s anointed who have an inside track to the Lord. Let us ask Him without ceasing for safe passage through economic challenges that may lie ahead. In any event we should be thankful we have safe passage to our eternal home. We have been anointed with oil.

Until the next time, may the Lord bless you and keep you, may His light shine upon you and grant you peace.

Jim and Sharon